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United Nations Children's Fund

Summary

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is pleased to submit its report to the fifth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The present report provides an overview of UNICEF activities towards the implementation of recommendations issued by the Permanent Forum for the past three sessions.

Overall, since the establishment of the Permanent Forum, indigenous issues have gained more visibility within the organization, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. The recommendations of the Permanent Forum have guided the work of UNICEF in some key areas related to indigenous peoples. The momentum generated by the Permanent Forum, through such parallel activities as technical workshops and through the mobilization of such actors as the Inter-Agency Support Group or the Committee on the Rights of the Child has influenced the work of UNICEF on indigenous issues at the global, regional and country levels.

As stated in previous reports, UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which, in addition to the principle of non-discrimination, specifically mentions in its article 30 the right of indigenous children to enjoy their own culture, speak their own language and practise their own religion. The UNICEF mission states that in everything it does, the most disadvantaged children ... have priority. The increased attention paid to indigenous children has materialized with a specific mention of indigenous peoples in the new UNICEF medium-term strategic

* The present document was submitted late to ensure the inclusion of the most recent information.

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I. Response to recommendations addressed exclusively to the United Nations Children's Fund

Indigenous children and youth

1. Since all of the work of the United Nations Children's Fund by definition relates to children, section I will focus on child participation.

2. As underlined by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and constantly emphasized by UNICEF, indigenous children's participation in decision-making, both within their communities and in the broader society, is an essential element for the realization of their rights. Children's participation in decisions affecting them not only means that children have the right to express themselves; it also trains them to become active citizens and gives visibility to their cause.

3. Following a recommendation of the Permanent Forum, the UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, with the support of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation, organized a meeting of indigenous children and adolescents from Latin America and the Caribbean in July 2005 in Madrid. About 80 children from 17 countries participated in the meeting and adopted a final declaration in which they urged Governments, indigenous people's organizations and international organizations to act for the realization of their rights. While the meeting was in itself a milestone, the process leading to the meeting was no less important. In each country, workshops and other activities took place with children to prepare for the Madrid meeting. That process gave visibility to indigenous children's rights, influenced national political agendas and contributed to creating indigenous youth networks.

4. Participation in decision-making enables children to be aware of their rights and have the ability to claim them. In Colombia for example, with UNICEF support, 728 adolescents from the Wayúu, Arhuaco, Guambiana, Nasa, Pasto, Inga, Awa, Quillacinga and Cocama peoples made participatory analyses of the situation of their rights from an ethnic perspective, with a specific focus on their communities. Two meetings were held in the communities of Ipiales and Guambia to initiate the creation of a youth network to support the actions deriving from the meeting.

5. Child participation can also influence political processes and help children communicate with their community leaders. For instance, in Ecuador, an agenda for observance of the rights of indigenous children and adolescents was drawn up as a result of a participatory and consultative process involving 4,000 children and adolescents and 2,900 indigenous leaders of the country.

6. UNICEF also uses participatory activities as a tool to educate, promote tolerance and end discrimination. In Mexico, UNICEF facilitated an exchange between urban indigenous adolescents in collaboration with the government of Mexico City. The exchange brought together indigenous youth from the major cities of Mexico to share experiences and formulate future plans. The effort resulted in the creation of a national network of adolescents to address the particular issues and realities of urban indigenous communities in Mexico.

Indigenous women

7. UNICEF is fully involved in promoting the rights of women and girls and, in doing so, is guided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Examples of culturally sensitive programmes with indigenous women and girls are mentioned throughout the present report under the relevant sections.

II. Information and suggestions regarding the Millennium Development Goals

Millennium Development Goals

8. While all the Millennium Development Goals affect children, the present report will concentrate more precisely on those Goals that are directly related to children and represent a focus of the United Nations Children's Fund's work.

Extreme poverty and hunger

9. All UNICEF activities are aimed at addressing poverty and promoting sustainable development. In indigenous communities, UNICEF supports activities to promote safe drinking water and to address malnutrition.

10. In Paraguay for instance, cooperation agreements have been established with three indigenous organizations, and alliances have been made with indigenous communities and organizations in the context of projects and programmes financed by UNICEF. Projects for provision of supplies for water and sanitation in the indigenous communities of Macherety, Chandi and La Herenecia have been supported, as well as the monitoring of the quality of water in Caaguazu and Chaco Central (more than 30 indigenous communities are located in those areas). In health and nutrition, the institutional capacity of local public services for the adequate care of indigeneous children and women was strengthened with the cultural adaptation of the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness manual to two indigenous languages. The training of health workers and volunteers was promoted and research on food safety and mother and infant health in the Lower Chaco was carried out. Oral rehydration rooms have been set up in Central Chaco and storerooms have been set up in Caaguazu.

Education

11. For many years, UNICEF has been supporting bilingual and intercultural education programmes in indigenous areas. That work is ongoing. With the Millennium Development Goals related to education, the promotion of gender equality has become a priority of the United Nations Children's Fund's work in the area of education.

12. The 25 by 2005 initiative was launched to give priority to girls' education. The stated objective was to redouble efforts to eliminate gender disparities in primary education in 25 priority countries by 2005. Among the participating countries is Bolivia, which has a large indigenous population. In that country, UNICEF has made significant efforts to promote indigenous girls' education through various

means. Under the "Indigenous Girls' Education" project, UNICEF supported the building of boarding facilities and funded a school transport system to get nearly 1,500 primary school children to class on time and in better mental and physical condition. It also delivered school materials to more than 26,000 primary school students in selected municipalities. With the aim of keeping working girls in school, the Education for Working Girls in El Alto project granted scholarships to 560 girls that attend night school and helped obtain certificates and national identity cards for 378 of the girls. In coordination with the municipality of El Alto, the Friendly School project was implemented in 12 primary schools in 2005. Results included the provision of school equipment, such as computers, sport kits and educational materials, and teacher training.

13. The Indigenous Girls' Education project in Bolivia also helped to improve the quality of education by supporting teacher initiatives on innovative teaching strategies and methods. The most successful innovations were shared with other schools. Recognizing innovative ideas helped with teacher development and rewarded schools with educational materials. UNICEF also contributed to the institutionalization of non-formal education (adult education) with the Ministry of Education. That team helped to develop curricular guidelines, norms and procedures, intercultural bilingual education strategies, primary education modules and a national database that helps to compile and process statistical data and indicators.

14. In Paraguay, a special project has been developed to strengthen the basic education of indigenous girls in three ethnic groups, in alliance with diverse sectors and indigenous people's organizations. Inter-institutional spaces of dialogue on indigenous education at both the national and subnational levels, have been established. Research work has been carried out on the situation of indigenous education in Paraguay and on the situation of indigenous girls and women within the context of education. Teaching materials utilized at indigenous schools have been revised and updated, with a view to deleting gender stereotypes and making materials friendly to girls. Teachers have been trained on the gender and cultural aspects of their work with indigenous communities. Work has also been done with indigenous organizations to promote the incorporation of young indigenous girls into the formal educational system. The indigenous organizations with which the project has worked have achieved a greater regularity in the attendance of teachers to schools and a greater acceptance by indigenous families of girls' attendance at school. Literacy centres for young and adult indigenous people have opened, with wide female participation in the literacy courses offered. During 2005, a 17 per cent rise in school enrolment of indigenous children in relation to 2004 was registered. Of the children who enrolled in 2005, 80 per cent have completed their school year (20 per cent more than in 2004). A total of 100 per cent of the indigenous children have been registered in the civil register, and those in the third grade of basic education have also obtained their national identity cards.

15. In Namibia, UNICEF has continued to focus its attention on educationally marginalized children. Interventions have drawn attention to those left behind and left out of the system, noted for its high level of access (enrolment) and primary level retention. Outreach efforts for San children in Otjozonjupa and for girls' retention in Kavango both highlight a rights-based approach in order for duty bearers to meet their obligations. Training workshops for teachers on improving

retention of San children in primary school in one region and training support with teaching methodologies have also been provided.

Maternal mortality

16. Addressing maternal mortality among indigenous women requires health services to take better account of the cultural traditions and customs linked to childbirth. An innovative approach was undertaken by UNICEF in Peru. That programme intervention has been mentioned in a previous report to the Permanent Forum, when it was first implemented. Four years later, UNICEF has been able to measure the success of and draw lessons from the experience.

17. The intervention developed by UNICEF-Peru during the last four years shows that taking an intercultural approach to obstetric care increases the coverage of institutional obstetric services, reduces maternal and perinatal mortality and establishes a more gratifying relationship between the service provider and the user. Cultural differences and resistance can be transformed into "binding systems" for placing users in contact with health professionals and technical staff in rural areas.

18. A participatory study done in 2000 shows that resistance to institutional birthing is mostly cultural in nature. Four strategies were instituted to overcome that barrier. They include maternity waiting houses to resolve the difficulty posed by geographic distance; family and community support to make maternity and the mother's condition a priority; comprehensive health insurance to cover the cost; and the cultural adaptation of maternity services to overcome the fear of cultural differences that prevent indigenous women from seeking maternal health care. Traditional practices were systematized on the basis of universal know-how and several research projects conducted at the local operational level. Finally, UNICEF-Peru identified the health facilities where the staff was most committed to this intervention and provided them with training. Facilities that provide training for the health sector now have a more open approach to culturally sensitive health care. Overall, the experience has transformed everyday service by promoting cultural changes in the approach to care and in its routine elements.

19. Until 1999, only 24 per cent of the rural mothers in Peru gave birth at a health-care facility. In the regions served by the UNICEF-Peru Cooperation Programme, the proportion has tripled. Now three out of four pregnant women avail themselves of health-care services, particularly for childbirth (considered a transcendental rite of passage, as it is an act that entails life). Over time, the experience has become local and regional policy, and it was adopted recently by the Ministry of Health as a national standard to be implemented as public policy throughout the country.

Child mortality

20. The causes of child mortality are multiple. Indigenous children are in many cases very vulnerable owing to poverty, malnutrition, lack of safe drinking water and lack of access to basic services. The United Nations Children's Fund works to address the root causes of child mortality in indigenous communities, in particular those in remote areas.

21. In Brazil, the deaths of 15 children among the Guarani-Kaiowás indigenous people in the south of the State of Mato Grosso do Sul, between January and March 2005, led UNICEF to conduct a rapid assessment to verify the nature and extent of the emergency. It was found that the children were dying of diarrhoea and that there

epidemiological defences were low, due in large part to malnutrition. Most of those deaths could have been avoided by provision of safe drinking water and vitamin A. Thanks to emergency support and a national appeal in Brazil, UNICEF procured 9,000 ceramic water filters and supplies of sodium hypochlorite solution. Through its partnership with the National Health Foundation and in coordination with local municipal authorities, training in the use and maintenance of water filters was provided for close to 9,000 families in 15 municipalities, and megadoses of vitamin A were administered to the children. As a result of that initiative, under-five mortality among indigenous children dropped from 102 (per 1,000 live births) in the first 10 months of 2004 to 61 in the same period of 2005.

22. In Peru, vaccine brigades travel from health centres to isolated rural Andean and Amazon communities in Cusco, Apurimac and Ayacucho. So far, 82 of the brigades have been instituted and have managed to protect 12,300 children in 220 rural communities, many of them indigenous. Project activities were also expanded specifically on malaria control and on health improvement of the Candoshi and Shapra mothers and children. Continued assistance was provided to help control hepatitis B among the Candoshi and the Shapra in Alto Amazonas, which is threatening the extinction of those ethnic groups. The support from UNICEF-Peru focused specifically on immunizing newborns in an effort to break the cycle of transmission, which affects 75 per cent of the population in the indigenous communities. In the Condorcanqui Province (Department of Amazonas), UNICEF-Peru helped to control an epidemic outbreak of human rabies, which caused the deaths of 11 children from the Awaun and Wampis ethnic communities.

Data collection and disaggregation

23. Data collection and disaggregation is a priority issue for the Permanent Forum, and UNICEF has integrated the recommendations of the Permanent Forum into its work in statistics. In addition to country specific studies and situation analyses, of its last round of Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) being carried out in 2005, UNICEF has included questions related to the mother tongue, religion and ethnic group of the head of the household.

Intercultural perspective

24. As previously noted, programmes involving indigenous peoples can be significantly strengthened when they adopt an intercultural perspective. Examples presented above in the area of health and education show that programmes are more efficient when they take into account that perspective.

25. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, for instance, the intercultural approach has been applied mainly in the work in indigenous municipalities and communities in Zulia and Amazonas. The approach was intended specifically as a useful tool for improving the quality of health and education services while simultaneously making them more culturally relevant to the indigenous peoples benefiting from the Programme for the Andean Region (PROANDES) and the Amazon Subregional Programme.

26. However, to put an end to discrimination, it is key to communicate the importance of an intercultural perspective within the general population. In Mexico, UNICEF has carried out a project, "windows on my world", aiming to loosen

Capacity-building and participation

the project, the indigenous adolescents participated in the first indigenous youth meeting, which gathered more than 1,200 youths participating in cultural, recreational and sports activities.

35. In the Philippines, after the December 2005 floods, UNICEF assisted communities in facing the disaster. The beneficiaries were the upland poor families and the indigenous Agta, Dumagat and Remontado communities residing in the mountain ranges of Eastern Luzon. In November 2005, family care packs were sent to approximately 1,500 families in Quezon province that were displaced by the escalating hostilities between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the New People's Army. School materials were also sent to more than 8,000 students who were caught in the conflict between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front in Sulu. Those activities were implemented with strong participation of the non-governmental organizations and faith-based organizations that have access to indigenous peoples and mountain communities. Local government units and community organizations provided all the labour requirements in all the construction projects.